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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: GEORGIAN AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTS
AZERBAIJAN'S ASSISTANCE DURING CONFLICT

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Georgian Ambassador Nikoloz Natbiladze told the Ambassador on August 26 that Russian President Medvedev's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was a "shocking" figleaf for an "occupation." Natbiladze argued that Russia's goal is to change Georgia's government and gain influence over the oil and gas infrastructure on Georgian territory. Throughout the conflict, Natbiladze said, Baku has provided important behind-the-scenes economic assistance to Georgia, including sending money overland from the Azerbaijani central bank while the airport in Tbilisi was closed. Georgia understands why Azerbaijan has maintained a low profile and limited its public posturing during the conflict, he said. End Summary.

12. (C) Georgian Ambassador Nikoloz Natbiladze met with the Ambassador on August 26 to discuss the situation in Georgia. Natbiladze several times noted Tbilisi's deep gratitude for U.S. assistance.

Russia's Strategy

13. (C) Natbiladze told the Ambassador that Russian President Medvedev's August 26 recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was "shocking" and was the legal figleaf of an "occupation." Medvedev's decree shows the "real Russian face," as Moscow's goal is to control the two territories. Natbiladze said Georgia hopes to work with the international community to fight the Russian measure legally. Natbiladze suggested EU sanctions against Russia, public condemnations of the Russian decision, and moving western navies offshore of Abkhazia to grant international legitimacy to Georgia's claims to sovereignty over Abkhazia would be welcome. Natbiladze expects the Georgian Parliament to take up a counter law to Medvedev's decree, as "Georgia will not allow these territories to leave." The Georgian Foreign Minister also will be hosting a meeting of all Georgian Ambassadors in Vienna in the coming days to discuss Georgia's options in dealing with Russia.

14. (C) Natbiladze argued that Russia's goal is to change Georgia's government and gain influence over the oil and gas infrastructure on Georgian territory. Natbiladze said Georgian intelligence supported his view. Russia's military actions have caused a rallying effect within Georgian society, with 90 percent of the population supporting President Saakashvili. Speaking about Russia's military presence in the conflict zone, Natbiladze said Georgia possesses unconfirmed information that Russia plans to increase its military presence, probably under the guise of

"peacekeepers," in South Ossetia. Natbiladze also noted a recent Russian Ministry of Defense announcement that Russia will bring some naval forces to Abkhazia, ostensibly to help withdraw Russian peacekeepers.

15. (C) Natbiladze noted that Russia could apply a similar scenario -- provoking a conflict in a disputed territory and citing the need to protect Russian citizens -- in Ukraine. Natbiladze also said Russia could use the conflict to pressure Azerbaijan, noting an upcoming military exercise in Armenia.

Azerbaijan Provided Important Assistance

16. (C) Natbiladze said Tbilisi appreciates the GOAJ's strong assistance to Georgia throughout the conflict. Tbilisi also appreciates why Azerbaijan has needed to maintain a low public profile and values the fact that the GOAJ has taken concrete steps -- particularly in the economic sphere -- to assist Georgia. Natbiladze said he has met three times with Prime Minister Artur Rasizade and once with Deputy Foreign Minister Khalafov during the conflict. He noted they were immediately responsive to Georgia's request for assistance.

17. (C) Natbiladze said Baku has provided important economic assistance, as Georgia had been totally reliant on Azerbaijani petrol and diesel from August 7-15. The Azerbaijani central bank provided cash overland by truck to Georgia while the airport was still closed; Natbiladze said this was critical to stopping an incipient run on Georgian banks. Azersun -- a private company widely rumored to be

linked to the Aliyev family -- provided basic consumer products which helped prevent a rush on Georgian shops, and Baku also sent wheat flour to Georgia. Azerbaijan facilitated the travel of the 5 Baltic/CEE presidents to Georgia through Ganja, which Natbiladze referred to as an important show of moral support.

18. (C) Natbiladze said Azerbaijan is "scared" of Russia, however, citing the fact that the MFA "informed" the Russian Ambassador here it would facilitate the 5 presidents' travel to Georgia, so Russia would not assume it was providing military assistance.

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